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Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council

Analysis of Barriers and Recommendations Developed in Consultation with the Advisory Committee on Accessibility and Systemic Ableism (ACASA)

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- Language and editorial style in this report reflect those applied by the Advisory Committee on Accessibility and Systemic Ableism and its membership, and not necessarily those of SSHRC or the Government of Canada.

- If you are using assistive technologies, such as a screen reader, ensure that you have configured punctuation settings to either "all" or "most" in order to discern gender-inclusive terminology used within the French document.

- To learn more about our linguistic choices, please consult the section **Some notes on Language**, or the **Guide on Inclusive French Writing and Lexicon**, developed by Andréa Peters, the Committee Chair and Lead Author of both of ACASA's reports.

This report should be cited as: Peters, A., Honisch, S.S., Arentsen, M., Bruce, C., Catala, A., Fichten, C., Lindsay, S., Lord, P., Martino, A.S., McGuire-Adams, T., Mendez de la Brena, D., Nolan J., Peers, D. (2024). Analysis of barriers and recommendations developed in consultation with the Advisory Committee on Accessibility and Systemic Ableism (ACASA).

Alternate format

Analysis of Barriers and Recommendations Developed in Consultation with the Advisory Committee on Accessibility and Systemic Ableism (ACASA) [Word - 210 KB]

On this page

0.0 Executive Summary

📹◀ **American Sign Language (ASL) version of the executive summary (no audio):**

Jump to **Executive summary**

🔊 **Audio version of the executive summary:**

Jump to **Executive summary**

The Advisory Committee on Accessibility and Systemic Ableism (henceforth ACASA) presented this report to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (henceforth SSHRC), to provide guidance, and concrete, actionable recommendations for making SSHRC's policies, services, programs, and processes more accessible. The recommendations made in this report are essential to SSHRC's inaugural Accessibility Plan and Progress Report, forming the core of the agency's accessibility work going forward.

ACASA was convened in June 2022, and has held a series of fifteen (15) full committee meetings on Zoom, in addition to separate meetings with ACASA's Chair and Co-chair, and SSHRC leadership on MS Teams. ACASA comprises thirteen (13) members, representing different cultural perspectives, geographic regions, languages, lived experiences, cultural and ethnicity-related identities, genders and gender identities, and disability identities. Committee members include a master's student, a postdoctoral fellow, and a sessional lecturer, in addition to tenure-track and tenured professors.

This report is the result of collective work, and includes insights from the community focus groups, as well as ideas shared by members of the other two federal research funding agencies, the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC) and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR). We would be remiss not to also recognize the feedback we received from many volunteers and community experts, including those working in disability justice.

ACASA's report is grounded in **Critical Disability Studies** as well as **Mad Studies** [English only link] and draws on intersectional modes of analysis to explore how SSHRC can participate in dismantling the culture of ableism by identifying and changing discriminatory practices against students and researchers with disabilities within higher education and across Canada.

ACASA's work contributes to dismantling ableism in research by identifying and replacing ableist words used in SSHRC's current funding programs and evaluation criteria, and by analyzing how existing federal legislation, more broadly, perpetuates **discrimination** and harm at the intersections of ethnicity, gender, sexuality, disability, and class. The Lead Author and Co-Author of this report, in consultation with ACASA (for which they are also Chair and Co-Chair), elected to use person-first language ("people with disabilities") rather than disability-first language ("disabled people") in their work. However, the Committee recognizes and honours the individual preferences of all people with disabilities, whose identities and language choices are shaped by complex histories and by lived experience.

In addition to drawing upon the pillars of Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility (**IDEA**) based on the Tri-Agency Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan, ACASA also provided extensive guidance around equitable assessment and evaluation practices.

Access recommendations also address web content, communication methods, and application processes. ACASA's recommendations target eligibility criteria, application tools and platforms, as well as improved transparency and accountability for access supports. In the application evaluation section, the recommendations focus on evaluation criteria, special circumstances, and confidentiality. For application reviews, recommendations address accessible communications, documents, and committee workload. Lastly, ACASA provides recommendations for reducing the direct costs of research for people with disabilities, and for eliminating the bureaucratic hurdles of separate applications to support accessibility needs in research.

1.0 Context of the Committee and Its Report

Note: Please be aware that, throughout the report, we underline and use bold characters to indicate that titles of laws, terms defined in our glossary, and references to other sections in the report have descriptive hyperlinks embedded in them for greater accessibility.

1.1 Creation and Context of the Committee

The Advisory Committee on Accessibility and Systemic Ableism (ACASA) was created in June 2022, by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) to strengthen its equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) practices and mandate.

ACASA's primary mandate was to provide leadership, and to offer recommendations that would help SSHRC in developing its **Accessibility Plan**. The goal of the Accessibility Plan is to promote and further greater inclusion in the support and funding offered to people who identify as having a **disability** (or more)or as disabled. We used an approach grounded in Disability Studies, Mad Studies, and **intersectionality** to focus on ways SSHRC could help make academia less systemically ableist and discriminatory against students and researchers with disabilities across Canada. According to the **Law Commission of Ontario**:

> **Ableism** is a belief system, analogous to racism, sexism or ageism, that sees persons with disabilities as being less worthy of respect and consideration, less able to contribute and participate, or of less inherent value than others. Ableism may be conscious or unconscious, and may be embedded in institutions, systems, or the broader culture of a society. It can limit the opportunities of persons with disabilities and reduce their inclusion in the life of their communities (Law Commission of Ontario, n.d.).

Discrimination against people with disabilities is often linked to **prejudicial attitudes**, **negative stereotyping**, and the overall **stigma** that continues to surround disability (Ontario Human Rights Commission, n.d.). These concepts are deeply interrelated, as stereotyping, stigma and **prejudice** can all lead to or contribute to discrimination and ableism towards people with disabilities in academia and elsewhere. (Please refer to section **Some Notes on Language**, the **Guide on Inclusive French Writing and Lexicon**, and **Appendix A: Acronyms and Definitions** for more context on our committee's approach to language).

Activities

From June 2022, ACASA held a total of 15 meetings (lasting on average 2.5 hours each), along with several planning and organization meetings the committee's Chair and Co-chair held with SSHRC in between full committee meetings. In addition, five

focus groups were held (approximately 1.5 hours each) during November 2022 with members of the broader disability community in Canada.

This report is the result of collective work, and includes insights from the community focus groups, as well as ideas shared by members of the other two federal research funding agencies, the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC) and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR). We would be remiss not to also recognize the feedback we received from many volunteers and community experts, including those working in disability justice.

Composition of ACASA

The ACASA committee has 13 members, and its composition was established by SSHRC through a Canada-wide open call application process. The final selection of committee members occurred in late June 2022. The committee attempted to reflect as much as possible the vast diversity of people contributing to knowledge and research in Canada. Our group embodied representation from across a wide range of historical and cultural perspectives, geographic and linguistic diversity, lived experiences, cultural and ethnicity-related identities, genders and gender identities, and disability identities, including but not limited to:

- one graduate student working on a master's;

- different career stages, disabilities, genders and gender identities, ethnicities, Francophones, Anglophones, and several people who have neither French nor English as a first language, as well as different regions, academic disciplines, and institutional affiliations;

- a mix of representation from long-established Canadians, and those of various immigrant and or temporary status backgrounds (particularly, Caribbean and different parts of Latin America).

The committee members elected Andréa Peters (Chair) and Stefan Sunandan Honisch (Co-chair) during our first meeting:

- **Andréa Peters**
  Committee Chair and Lead Author of both the English and French reports, and the **Guide on Inclusive French Writing and Lexicon**
  Master's student, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Moncton

- **Stefan Sunandan Honisch**
  Committee Co-chair and Co-author of the English report
  Honorary Research Associate / Sessional Lecturer, Department of Theatre and Film, University of British Columbia

- **Maria Fernanda Arentsen**
  Full Professor, Department of French Studies, Languages and Literatures, University of Saint-Boniface

- **Cynthia Bruce**
  Associate Professor, Creative Arts Therapies, Concordia University

- **Amandine Catala**
  Full Professor, Philosophy, Université du Québec à Montréal

- **Catherine Fichten**
  Professor, Psychology, Dawson College

- **Sally Lindsay**
  Associate Professor, Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy, University of Toronto

- **Phil Lord**
  Assistant Professor, Faculty of Law, University of Moncton

- **Alan Santinele Martino**
  Assistant Professor (Teaching Stream), Community Health Sciences, University of Calgary

- **Tricia McGuire-Adams**
  Associate Professor, Faculty of Kinesiology and Physical Education, University of Toronto

- **Dresda Emma Mendez de la Brena**
  Postdoctoral Research Fellow, Communication Studies, Concordia University

- **Jason Nolan**
  Associate Professor, School of Early Childhood Studies, Toronto Metropolitan University

- **Danielle Peers**
  Associate Professor, Faculty of Kinesiology, Sport, and Recreation, University of Alberta

1.2. Scope of the Report

Structure of the Report

The committee discussed how to organize our work, and decided to format the report following the natural life cycle of an application, all the way to the announcement of awards. The committee decided to proceed this way both because of our familiarity with the application processes for SSHRC funding and because this approach allowed us to focus on all aspects of the process to identify gaps and barriers throughout. We acknowledge that some of our recommendations will require significant work. In recognition of sometimes difficult time constraints, we opted to frame certain recommendations in a way that would allow for quicker implementation, even if the recommendations themselves do not go far enough in transforming SSHRC's programs, policies, and processes.

The report is also a reflection of three IDEA pillars based on the **Tri-Agency** Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan referenced by the **Advisory Committee to Address Anti-Black Racism in Research and Research Training report**, published in February 2023: fair access to research support; equitable participation in the research system; and IDEA in research practice and research design. Also reflected was a fourth concept of our own, equitable assessment and evaluation in research (please refer to **Barrier 3** and **Barrier 4** for more details on this). Some of the other principles framing each section of our work include **transparency** and **accountability**, an **intersectional approach** to systemic IDEAchange for the well-being of **marginalized communities and identities**, **innovation**, and **collaboration**.

Key Accessibility Barriers

Key accessibility barriers are outlined in relation to five categories or "moments" of interactions with SSHRC throughout an application process, each with its own set of recommendations:

- **Barrier 1: Accessible Communication and Content** is divided into four sub-barriers:

  1. Web-Based Materials;
  2. Communication with SSHRC Staff;
  3. Webinars or SSHRC-Hosted Events; and
  4. SSHRC Results, Appeals, and Post-award Forms.

- **Barrier 2: Application Process** is divided into three sub-barriers:

  1. Eligibility Criteria;
  2. Application Tools and Platforms;
  3. Transparency and Accountability for Accessibility Supports.

- **Barrier 3: Application Evaluation** is divided into two sub-barriers:

  1. Evaluation Criteria; and
  2. "Special Circumstances", Information Confidentiality, and Self-Identification for People with Disabilities.

- **Barrier 4: Application Reviewers** is divided into three sub-barriers:

  1. Accessible Application Review Communications, Tools, and Documents;
  2. Reviewing Committee Workload; and
  3. Reviewing Committee Meetings.

- **Barrier 5: Financial Considerations: <u>Disability Tax</u> and Accessibility Tax in Research**

Legislative and Sociocultural Contexts: Accessible Canada Act, SSHRC Accessibility Plan

Note: ACASA recognizes that wording such as "handicapped" and "**<u>merit </u>**review" is discriminative and ableist. Yet, to reference laws or policies that have such wording in their titles, we do not have much leeway. However, we take language and its impact on accessibility and inclusion very seriously. Please refer to the sections titled **<u>Some Notes on Language</u>**, **<u>Appendix A</u>**, or the **<u>Guide on Inclusive French Writing and Lexicon</u>** for more information on our approach to language in our work.

The Canadian disability landscape has been shaped by several key pieces of legislation that prioritize equal rights and accessibility for individuals with disabilities. The **<u>Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms</u>**, established in 1982, guarantees equal protection under the law for all Canadians, and prohibits discrimination based on cognitive or physical disabilities.

The **<u>Canadian Human Rights Act</u>**, enacted in 1985, prohibits discrimination and harassment against various groups, including people with disabilities. The federal government and First Nations governing bodies are required to abide by this

legislation, as are federally regulated private sector companies such as banks and broadcasters.

The **Employment Equity Act**,introduced in 1995, focuses on federal government employees and aims to **eliminate barriers preventing individuals with disabilities** from fully participating in the workforce. It also mandates that employers provide necessary accommodations for employees with disabilities.

Each Canadian province or territory has its own human rights legislation, making it illegal to discriminate against people with disabilities in different areas such as employment, housing, and provision of goods and services. In particular, provincial legislation such as the **Ontario Human Rights Code** offers additional protection from discrimination based on age, ethnicity, marital status, gender, sexual orientation, and disability. It also prohibits actions that discriminate that harm accessibility, employment, membership in unions, and more.

Provincial legislation specific to disability and accessibility further promote accessibility and human rights. The **Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)**, established in 2005, is the most firmly established legislation of its kind in Canada. It requires both the public and private sectors to follow accessibility standards across five categories: information and communications, customer service, transportation, employment, and design of public spaces. This disability policy includes provisions for web accessibility (**Information and Communications Standards, Section 14**,) and goes beyond other Canadian accessibility policies in the country, by mandating that not only public spaces be accessible. This means, for example, that businesses must provide their staff training on accessibility, referred to as **The Nova Scotia Post-Secondary Accessibility Framework** focuses on postsecondary education, and constitutes a very important milestone, which, along with Ontario, established **Nova Scotia as a lead for disability rights in Canada**. British Columbia and Newfoundland are in the process of developing similar policies, but they are currently still in preliminary stages.

Other provincial accessibility acts include Manitoba's **Accessibility for Manitobans Act** published in 2013, and Nova Scotia's **Accessibility Act** published in 2017. Quebec's **Act to secure handicapped persons in the exercise of their rights with a view to achieving social, school and workplace integration**, enacted in 1978 and updated in 2004 and 2023, focuses on the integration and rights of people with disabilities, as well as the **Québec Standard sur l'accessibilité des sites Web (SGQRI 008 2.0) (SGQRI 008 2.0, available only in French).**.

Canada's Standard on Web Accessibility, while not law, is effective from 2011, and requires Government of Canada websites and web applications to meet the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 Level AA criteria, ensuring a baseline of accessibility for online content. Finally, the **Accessible Canada Act** (Bill C-81), passed in 2019 with unanimous support, is a transformative legislation that begins to address accessibility nationwide. It applies to Parliament, Crown corporations, federal government, and private sector businesses under federal authority. The act allows flexibility for organizations to implement accessibility measures, with specific requirements to be determined by the **Canadian Accessibility Standards Development Organization**. The goal is to achieve full accessibility in Canada by 2040.

In the research sphere, many initiatives and programs have been established globally and in Canada to promote accessibility, equity, diversity, and inclusion. Internationally, initiatives such as Athena SWAN in Australia (2005), and the United States' See Change with STEMM Equity Achievement (SEA-Change) and National Science Foundation's ADVANCE, have aimed to address gender equity in academia. In Canada, the **Dimensions: Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in Canada**program on advancing equity and diversity in research was developed.

The **Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA),** initiated in 2012, is a global effort to encourage best practices in evaluating research beyond relying solely on journal publications. The **Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment**, created in January 2022 and based in the European Union, is another emerging initiative seeking to reform research assessment practices.

To focus on the specific needs of Indigenous research, the **Indigenous Advisory Circle** was formed in 2014, providing guidance on **definitions of Indigenous research and resources**, which SSHRC uses to inform its work. With the guidance of the Indigenous Advisory Circle, SSHRC also created an **Indigenous Research Statement of Principles**and landmark resources to support and guide Indigenous research and contributions, including the **Guidelines for the Merit Review of Indigenous Research**.

Over the years, Canadian federal research funding agencies have taken some steps to foster a more inclusive research ecosystem. This includes developing the **Guidelines for the Merit Review of Indigenous Research** and **Guidelines for**

Effective Research Training. In 2018, these agencies published their equity, diversity, and inclusion action plan, titled the **Tri-Agency EDI Action Plan (2018-2025)** and became signatories of DORA in 2019.

In 2020, initiatives were launched to support Indigenous research and research training, including the launch of **Setting New Directions to Support Indigenous Research and Research Training in Canada**. The **Indigenous Leadership Circle in Research** (Leadership Circle) was implemented by the Canada Research Coordinating Committee (CRCC), and they published their **progress report in 2021**. The **Reference Group for Appropriate Review of Indigenous Research was also developed.**

In 2021, SSHRC created the **Advisory Committee to Address Anti-Black Racism in Research and Research Training**, leading to the publication of a report in 2023. Similarly, in 2022, our **Advisory Committee on Accessibility and Systemic Ableism** was formed. The committee concluded that an independent report would provide the most effective contribution to the SSHRC Accessibility Plan, and provide accountability for SSHRC's ongoing commitment to students and researchers with disabilities. In addition, all the Tri-agencies (federal research funding agencies) published their accessibility plans in December 2022, highlighting their commitment to accessibility.

These initiatives and actions demonstrate ongoing (if often limited) efforts to promote equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility in research and research training in Canada. Our report hopes to be a continuation of these efforts, and aims to go beyond the current guidelines when they are insufficient to produce the kinds of systemic change we are working towards.

Some Notes on Language

As explained above, in the first version of the **SSHRC Accessibility Plan**, there were organizational challenges in building a culture of accessibility while adhering to the legislative guidelines and recommendations in the **Accessible Canada Act** (2019). ACASA makes several recommendations on language, taking an intersectional approach. While SSHRC recognized these limitations and intends to be a leader in this kind of essential language reframing, it was not able to do so in its first iteration of the Plan. Therefore, the Plan based its definition of "disability" according to the **Accessible Canada Act's** definition, defined as:

> Any impairment, including a physical, mental, intellectual, cognitive, learning, communication or sensory impairment — or a functional limitation — whether permanent, temporary or episodic in nature, or evident or not, that, in interaction with a barrier, hinders a person's full and equal participation in society (Accessible Canada Act, 2019).

ACASA aims to help SSHRC reduce its use of outdated and harmful language still promoted by the Canadian government (and elsewhere), while wanting to also acknowledge that the Accessible Canada Act represents an important milestone in Canada's human rights. Nonetheless, ACASA is also taking a leading role to promote anti-ableist, anti-racist, and gender / gender identity **inclusive language** in SSHRC programs and processes, to represent us and our shared sociohistorical contexts, as well as theoretical and community values, regardless of what the current guidelines advocate. As a result, several terms used in our report, including **disability**, are borroweddirectly from or inspired by previous work done by activists, community members, and scholars.

This includes the pivotal term "barrier", which is at the core of our report as we move through the life cycle of a funding application and work to determine how best to integrate real, concrete systemic change into all levels of SSHRC's programs and processes. In the Accessible Canada Act, the definition of barrier is ableist, and defined as:

> Anything — including anything physical, architectural, technological or attitudinal, anything that is based on information or communications or anything that is the result of a policy or a practice — that hinders the full and equitable participation in society of persons with an impairment, including a physical, mental, intellectual, cognitive, learning, communication or sensory impairment or a functional limitation.

The SSHRC Accessibility Plan also continues to use words such as "**capability**", "merit", "talent", "productivity", and "potential", which ACASA has identified as ableist language that SSHRC needs to change. Our report attempts to offer non-ableist forms to replace harmful language, but we refer to some of these programs in our work and acknowledge that our choices may not yet (or ever) succeed in representing all the different ways people choose to identify and represent themselves.

It is important to mention the lack of consensus in the broader disability community on whether to use person-first language (such as "persons with disabilities") or identity-first language (such as "disabled people"). We decided to use person-first language in our report but want to reinforce that we do not believe it is the only valid way to offer representation. Similarly, some people on the Autism spectrum may embrace disability identity ("Autistic person"), while others may not. The word Deaf with a capital "D" distinguishes Deafness as culture, from deafness understood as physiological (spelled with a noncapitalized "d"). And like in other communities, Deaf and hard of hearing people may not identify as having a disability.

Regarding the French version of this report, we are working diligently to find the best ways of integrating the different approaches to disability, including finding ways of translating the social and identity-based approaches to disability that are specific to the experience and history of francophone communities. Due to the specific background of francophone communities, the contents of this debate do not have the same meaning and are not defined in the same way as in English. Another challenge lies in the gendered nature of the French language and the way it shapes French grammar and syntax. As a result, the work of equity, diversity, accessibility, and inclusion of people with disabilities and of any other underserved and under-represented group or identity cannot be captured in all its complexity within a direct translation from English to French, nor in an exclusively binary language.

The SSHRC Accessibility Plan has made a commitment to using inclusive French, but again, some limitations exist in the cross-over with disability, given the **Accessible Canada Act**'s use of standard French (i.e., standard French that does not challenge the values of patriarchy of its social practices). ACASA has been unequivocally engaged and at the forefront of helping SSHRC begin its work towards more inclusive French language, to include feminization, some neutral language, and active use of non-binary language in all its complexity and variety.

To help improve the comprehension of our work, we have included a section on acronyms and important definitions in **Appendix A**, which explains in more detail how ACASA's approach to language directly contributes to the rest of our work and ideologies around IDEA and disability.

2.0 Systemic Barriers to Access in SSHRC's Current Program Design and Delivery

2.1. Application Review Process

SSHRC supports research, research training, and knowledge mobilization activities in the social sciences and humanities. Candidates apply for SSHRC funding through opportunities currently organized into "Research Training and Talent Development", "Insight Research", and "Research Partnerships" programs, in addition to Tri-agency funding program awards, research **grants**, **fellowships and scholarships**, through an independent application review process that selects research proposals.

Reviewers volunteer as external reviewers, committee members, or committee chairs. All applications are evaluated by a committee, but certain funding opportunities also seek external expert assessments to aid the committee in the evaluation of the proposal. Faculty members from Canadian institutions make up the majority of SSHRC's approximately 930 committee members per year, although members of non-academic sectors are often invited as well. Committee members, including both faculty and individuals from the non-academic sector, are recruited by SSHRC staff, and serve a term of one to three years for each funding opportunity. Committees are formed to ensure relevant expertise from the academic community. For some funding opportunities, such as the "Knowledge Synthesis Grants", expertise from the public, private, and/or not-for-profit sectors, is also sought. Committee members read and evaluate applications, and then the committee ranks them for SSHRC to apportion available funds.

2.2. Results, Appeals, and Awards Administration

After the application review process is complete, SSHRC shares results and accompanying documentation with **applicant**s through various means, including a SharePoint site called the Extranet or through the application platform itself. These means are also used during the application review process to disseminate review material to committee members and external assessors, and to collect committee member data.

For applicants who were not successful in the competition, SSHRC has an **appeals process**, whereby applicants can ask that a funding decision be reconsidered where evidence suggests an error occurred during SSHRC's application review process that resulted in an unsuccessful application.

For applicants who were successful in the competition, awards are either administered directly to the awardee (applicable only to awards held abroad for Research Training and Talent funding opportunities) or through an eligible Canadian postsecondary institution on SSHRC's behalf.

2.3. Participation of Researchers and Community Members with Disabilities in SSHRC Funding Programs

Note: The available data for the 2019, 2020, and 2021 competition years excludes all applicants who were uncomfortable or unable to share their personal information for either confidentiality or discrimination reasons. (Please refer to **Barrier 3** for more information on reasons why applicants may feel reluctant to either share information about disabilities or to self-identify as a person with disabilities.)

For the 2018-2020 period, the overall participation of persons with disabilities within SSHRC programs is broken down as such:

People with Disabilities

- Applicants = 4.8 %
- Awardees = 5.0 %
- Funding = 4.7 %
- Evaluation committee members = 4.6 %

The Overall Canadian Population

- 27% of Canadians are persons with disabilities (**Canadian Survey on Disability, 2017-2022**), showing a 5% increase since 2017.

- 6.7% of university professors, instructors, or teachers are persons with disabilities (**Survey of Postsecondary Faculty and Researchers, 2019**).

- According to the **Canadian Survey on Disability (2017-2022)**, the employment rate for Canadians aged 25 to 64 with disabilities was 62% in 2022, while the employment rate for Canadians without disabilities was 78%.

- 40% of unemployed people in Canada are persons with disabilities who have lower median incomes, are less likely to be employed, and are less likely to have a university degree than persons without a disability (Wall, 2017. "**Low income among persons with a disability in Canada**").

- According to Statistics Canada, persons with disabilities make up over 40% of the low-income population. Approximately 25% of persons reporting a disability are "earning less than one-half of the median Canadian income" (Statistics Canada and Wall, 2017).

- If Canada were a fully accessible and inclusive society, the economic benefits would amount to about $337.7 billion in calendar year 2017. This amount is equal to about 17.6% of the gross domestic product in that year (Tompa E, et al., 2022. **"Development and implementation of a framework for estimating the economic benefits of an accessible and inclusive society"**).

Based on these statistics, the level of participation of people with disabilities in Canada is low in the general population, but particularly lower both in academia as a whole, and among SSHRC applicants. This underrepresentation is the product of widespread discrimination and ableism. It is also a systemic representation that is perpetuated in academia and in society more broadly. Limited access to postsecondary education reduces the ability of people with disabilities to join academia, and to participate fully in higher education, including research, teaching, and service. Consequently, this limits the visibility of research, perspectives, lived experiences and contributions made by people with disabilities. It also deepens isolation in Canadian institutions for researchers with disabilities, due to various barriers. This includes a lack of support (such as mentorship opportunities), a lack of support for students with disabilities early in their education and academic trajectories or related careers, a lack of support in their research efforts, and a lack of support for researchers already in the system.

Even if the proportion of researchers with disabilities who are funded by SSHRC programs is close to the level of applicants who applied for funding, 5% were funded, and of the total funds awarded, 4.7% went to applications in which the principal investigator indicated a disability), this participation rate is exponentially lower than the approximate 27% reported by Statistics Canada (2022) and by Tompa's study (2017). While the likelihood of living with disabilities sharply

increases for people 70 and older, these two studies focused on Canadians 5 years and older for their statistics on disability rate, and on people between 25 to 64 years old for their statistics on the employment rate of people with disabilities in Canada.

As a result, elements of how Canadian institutions share the responsibility of increasing the representation, visibility and recognition of scholars with disabilities are featured throughout each section of this report, with specific recommendations to address gaps and shortcomings.

3.0 Body of Report: Barriers to Accessibility in Research

3.1. Barrier 1: Accessible Communication and Content

Introduction

Accessible communication is fundamental to all aspects of SSHRC programs and processes. SSHRC's communication channels include its website, posts on social media platforms such as LinkedIn, and events hosted by SSHRC online, in-person, and in hybrid formats. Communication access for applicants with disabilities is also crucial during all phases of grant application, including the preparation of applications and supporting grant holders with disabilities in fulfilling reporting requirements after a successful application.

Inaccessible application platforms, discriminatory eligibility criteria, and ableist policies are discussed in the section titled **Barrier 2**, discriminatory application review process identified in **Barrier 3**, and review processes that exclude reviewers with disabilities identified in **Barrier 4**.

Sub-Barrier 1: Web-Based Materials

Web-based materials include all programs and funding opportunity descriptions and instructions, policies, regulations, and guidelines, the SSHRC appeals process, and SSHRC competition data. Depending on the funding opportunity, SSHRC also uses a SharePoint site called the Extranet as a secure means to share materials with application reviewers and communicate with award holders and institutions. In addition, separate platforms such as Voxco Online Survey Software are sometimes used for surveys. While SSHRC's current webpages align with Government of

Canada web accessibility standards, barriers remain that relate both to the content and the presentation, preventing equitable access to SSHRC programs, and equitable participation in them. Barriers include overly complex and ambiguous language that may be difficult to understand and interpret, and non-inclusive language. The current layout and presentation of the website may present barriers such as a lack of audio-visual aids or user-control options. Complex graphs, visuals, columns, and text boxes may also present barriers.

Sub-Barrier 2: Communication with SSHRC Staff

SSHRC staff supports its community by providing explanations and clarifications primarily via email, but also by telephone. Applicants may reach out either via a general inbox for each funding opportunity, or via a centralized phone number. However, complex questions may be difficult to explain in an email. It may also be difficult to find a direct line with the best person to assist, and telephone communications are inaccessible to many. For emails, there are currently no guidelines on accessible and inclusive email practices. Alternative approaches to connect such as via Zoom or Teams are not consistently available.

Sub-Barrier 3: Webinars and SSHRC-Hosted Events

Currently, SSHRC hosts webinars for most funding opportunities (in both official languages) for applicants and institutional representatives. There are no in-house providers for Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) services, or for sign language interpretation in American Sign Language (ASL), Langue des signes du Québec (LSQ), and Plain Indigenous Sign Language (PISL). This means SSHRC staff must procure these services from external providers. Therefore, participants must request these accessibility services well in advance, which poses a barrier to full participation.

SSHRC's lack of control over the availability of its contracted services, and the lack of flexible deadlines to secure them, also perpetuate a model of inclusion based on individual need (case-by-case requests) rather than a systemic one. Also, it places the responsibility of accessibility and its related administrative and emotional burdens on researchers and students with disabilities rather than SSHRC.

Sub-Barrier 4: SSHRC Results, Appeals, and Post-Award Forms

As mentioned above, SSHRC most often shares competition results with applicants in PDF format via the Extranet. SSHRC also requests successful applicants complete and submit form-fillable PDFs to activate and maintain eligibility for their awards. These forms and documents are not fully inclusive or accessible to all individuals, including those who use assistive technologies. For appeals to a negative decision, the applicant must contact program staff (which has its own barriers), and then submit an appeal letter of no more than two pages in in PDF format, which can be inaccessible. No other formats for appeals are currently accepted. The follow-up exchanges about the results of the appeal are also only communicated in letter form. These processes are not adequately accessible or equitable.

Recommendations for Barriers to Accessible Communication and Content

The Advisory Committee recommends that SSHRC take concrete measures to bolster the cognitive accessibility, and the organization of content on its funding program pages, in redesigning its application processes. Specifically, the Advisory Committee asks SSHRC to adopt the following measures:

1. SSHRC must adopt inclusive language, including the full expression of non-binary terminology, to avoid perpetuating discrimination through outdated, ableist and harmful terms in their programs and services. The Advisory Committee also recommends that SSHRC ensure these language changes are reflected in all content on their website and in other resources (online and offline).

2. All SSHRC content, navigation, and formatting must be reviewed for clarity (removing any interpretive ambiguities), accessibility, inclusive and plain language (including for non-native French and English speakers). All content must be vetted by reputable external accessibility and inclusion experts. Additional recommendations by the Advisory Committee for the website and general accessibility of SSHRC materials include:

   - Consider allowing application evaluators to customize the format of required application to their own needs. This could, for example, include adapting PDFs to allow for increase of font, Word versions of the documents for assistive technology compatibility, and providing printed materials via mail (with safeguards for confidentiality of materials);

- Application forms in PDF requiring assessors to export into a Word doc for review present the largest barrier. The committee recommends SSHRC provide guidelines for creating accessible documents so exporting and manipulating application documents is not burdensome for evaluators with disabilities;

- SSHRC should reduce the number of columns and text boxes to improve cognitive accessibility;

- Train SSHRC staff about access barriers, and have an accessibility- and inclusion-trained team within SSHRC that is available to offer barrier-free support to applicants and award holders;

- Consider updating websites to provide options for users to navigate using mouse, keyboard, and voice commands to improve both accessibility and usability;

- SSHRC dashboards should be accessible for people with sight-related barriers, and those who use assistive technology to access written materials.

3. Ensure that contact information and application instructions are prominently placed on SSHRC's website for better accessibility. Also, ensure greater navigability and clarity of application instructions within applications platforms.

4. Explore the possibility of adding a live chat feature to the SSHRC website, but ensure this is done in a fully accessible manner to connect inquirers to relevant SSHRC staff.

5. Ensure greater transparency for all accessibility options in all stages of applications and awards.

6. For all funding opportunities, consider adding a section at the top of the page summarizing any important updates.

7. All grant and fellowship life cycle and end of grant or fellowship forms and achievement reports should be reviewed with the above considerations. The Committee recommends that SSHRC provide applicants, award holders, and institutional representatives with multiple options for contacting SSHRC staff. Options should include email, telephone, and videoconference. Because a wide range of needs and preferences in assistive technologies needs must be considered, certain tools critiqued by some are still essential to others (such

as the CART versus automatically generated captions) and need to be offered too. Our recommendations reflect this need for a plurality of approaches to **IDEA**.

8. In addition, ensure that the available contact options are clearly communicated on the website. Ensure all phone calls, videoconferences, and webinars include the following accessibility supports:

   - Live relay services for telephone calls;
   - Automatic closed captioning (French and English);
   - Simultaneous interpreters (French and English);
   - Live transcription or CART services (French and English);
   - American Sign Language (ASL);
   - Langue des Signes du Québec (LSQ);
   - Plain Indigenous Sign Language (PISL).

9. Aim beyond compliance with Government of Canada accessibility standards for the website, as they do not guarantee usability. Include testing and consulting with community members with lived experience of disability and inaccessibility in any updates.

10. Ensure that all materials can be accessible to applicants who use screen readers and other assistive technologies.

3.2. Barrier 2: Application Process

Introduction

The application process begins when SSHRC announces a funding opportunity or contest. On its launch day, about two to three months before the deadline, the SSHRC website describing the funding opportunity is updated, and the application platform is officially opened. Updates vary from minor changes (wording clarifications, updated deadlines) to policy changes (changes in eligibility, adding or modifying sections, adding in new policies such as data management plans). Following the launch, applicants must read the funding opportunity description to determine:

- Personal eligibility;
- Context, requirements, and submission deadlines;
- Monetary value, duration, and timeline of offered funding;

- Details of the evaluation and adjudication process; and
- Any additional information.

To apply, applicants must use the application platform to complete and submit the application form by the specified deadline. Once the specified deadline passes, the application platform is closed, and no further submissions are possible.

Students and researchers with disabilities encounter barriers at multiple stages in this process. For barriers related to the pre-application phase, namely understanding the requirements stated on the funding opportunity website, please refer to **Barrier 1**. Barrier 2 will be limited to the application platforms, eligibility criteria, and a lack of transparent policies for adaptive measures / accessibility support as well as extensions to the deadline.

Sub-Barrier 1: Eligibility Criteria

Applicants must meet several criteria to be eligible to apply for funding. For grants, the applicant must be affiliated with a Canadian institution, in most cases a postsecondary institution, that is eligible and willing to administer the grant funding. Institutions are not always willing to administer grant funding for researchers who are not fully employed by that institution, for example, sessional lecturers or adjunct professors. Students with disabilities are also less likely to both be accepted into postsecondary programs or be enrolled full time. As a result, precariously employed researchers (including postdoctoral fellows) and students are often unable to apply for grants. For scholarships and fellowships, the applicant is only eligible if they have completed fewer than twelve months of study in the program for which they are requesting funding, or if they have completed their doctoral degree no later than a specified cutoff date or period.

This time limit does not account for the deeply rooted barriers to accessibility involved in completing a graduate program. It exists primarily to limit the number of times an applicant can apply, in order to reduce the number of applications SSHRC receives each year. Students with disabilities are already more likely to encounter barriers to completing all stages of the funding application process, and this short eligibility window creates an additional obstacle. It is then compounded by the fact that not receiving funding forces many students to spend their time working part-time or full-time jobs to survive (often with more than one job at a time). This limits the amount of time and energy they can devote to their studies, thus leading to needing more time to complete said studies, while still only being eligible to apply

for SSHRC funding in their first year of study. Clearly, the accessibility barriers are piling up. A lack of extended eligibility leads to students with disabilities struggling to finance the rest of their studies, including the additional time they need to complete them that extends beyond the typical two years prescribed at the master's level, and those prescribed at the doctoral level.

While the "allowable inclusions" section provides applicants the opportunity to provide context on part-time studies or leaves of absences, so they can be considered when determining eligibility to funding, the eligibility criteria themselves often exclude applicants with different timelines. (Issues related to different timelines are further discussed in **Barrier 3, Sub-Barrier 1**.) There are also no set guidelines or rules to ensure the assessment of these "circumstances" is done equitably, with a deep understanding of IDEA and the value of supporting students and researchers with disabilities in the preliminary stages of their careers.

Sub-Barrier 2: Application Tools and Platforms

Applications to SSHRC's funding opportunities are primarily submitted through one of three different online platforms: the SSHRC Online System, Research Portal, or Convergence. Depending on the funding opportunity, applicants may need to access a fourth system to fill out and complete the **Canadian Common CV** (CCV). These platforms present various accessibility issues. In addition to accessibility issues associated with aging infrastructure, some of the application platforms are not compatible with some assistive technologies and are not at all, or are only partially, compliant with the **Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.1**. In addition, SSHRC has no accessibility standards for documents that applicants upload in support of their applications, such as research proposals, transcripts, bibliographies, references, letters of support, etc. (University Affairs has published **guidelines** on drafting more compelling letters of support for granting agencies, which are only available in English.) SSHRC has begun work to increase accessibility of application documents, which have been identified as the most inaccessible documents throughout the entire application process. However, these changes will take significant time to implement. Our recommendations below take this reality into account.

Sub-Barrier 3: Transparency and Accountability for Accessibility Supports

Apart from an existing touch point known as "Accessibility Inbox", SSHRC currently does not provide clear information about available access supports for its programs and policies. Currently, adaptive measures and extensions to deadlines are provided on an individualized, ad hoc basis. This approach prevents a culture of accessibility from taking hold, perpetuating inequitable benefits, and disproportionate risks to minoritized researchers. The distinction between "consumptive" and "transformative" access, as argued by Elizabeth Brewer, Melanie Yergeau, and Cynthia Selfe (2014): "the former allows people to enter a space or access a text. The latter questions and re-thinks the very construct of allowing" (pp. 153–54). In what follows, we summarize key recommendations put forward by the Advisory Committee.

Recommendations for Barriers to the Application Process

1. Ensure that the new **Tri-agency grants management solution (TGMS)** and Common CV under development are designed with accessibility in mind, rather than simply maintaining baseline compliance with the insufficient federal government accessibility guidelines.

2. While these processes are being revamped, we ask SSHRC to investigate ways to enhance the accessibility of existing application and CV platforms, to ensure compatibility with assistive technology, and to maintain compliance with successive, updated **Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG)**.

3. Develop and make publicly available accessible document templates for all required funding application attachments. To ensure consistency and equity in all phases of the application process, we recommend that applicants, including co-applicants, co-directors, collaborators, etc., use these templates for supplementary required materials.

4. Review the procedures in place by which applicants are asked to provide their curriculum vitae. For both the SSHRC CV and CCV, recommended measures include:

   - Allowing the applicant to provide their CV in an accessible format, given that the SSHRC platform CV template applicants currently have to use is deeply inaccessible;

   - Including a space in application documents to list community work;

- Providing applicants with options for writing out the full names of their research areas. Currently, SSHRC's drop-down menus do not accurately reflect the available range and scope of disciplinary and interdisciplinary fields.

5. Revise the "Special Circumstances" section of funding applications from an IDEA perspective, and ensure that accessibility and **privacy** of shared information are both key priorities within this framework. This could include considerations such as developing guidelines and training for applicants and reviewers, and ensuring that said training materials are accessible. (For example, Harvard's "Project Implicit" training module is widely used by institutions but is severely lacking in accessibility.)

6. Conduct a comprehensive review of eligibility criteria for all funding opportunities, using a Critical Disability Studies lens. This review includes the following items:

   - Prolong the eligibility period for graduate students (particularly at the master's level, which is significantly less well funded than PhDs), postdoctoral fellows and precariously employed faculty members with disabilities. The committee did not reach full consensus on whether this measure should also include other minoritized individuals who could benefit from such a measure. While it was agreed a wider eligibility could be helpful to many (including those who face challenges without a formal diagnosis of disability, a multitude of intersectional identities, those who experience food and housing insecurity, primary caregivers to children and other close ones, etc., and others), it also generated significant concerns. One such concern is that, in the absence of better systemic mechanisms to specifically support people with disabilities, widening the eligibility beyond people with disabilities could further invisibilize us, increase accessibility barriers, and decrease our likelihood of securing funding;

   - One way to alleviate forcing many marginalized groups to compete against one another for the same limited opportunities could be for SSHRC to work with the Tri-agencies to ensure affected applicants are not "pitted against one another" by the currently inadequate and insufficient support systems available. Ultimately, SSHRC needs to ensure that each minoritized group/identity receives better support and

financing through an IDEA and intersectional lens. (This long-term need is also reflected in **Recommendations for Barriers to Application Evaluation**);

- Consider defining "affiliation with a Canadian postsecondary" to include applicants who do not have tenure-track or tenured positions. Eligible affiliations should include sessional lecturers, instructors, adjunct professors, postdoctoral fellows, and research associates, to ensure that the widest possible pool of students and researchers with disabilities benefits from funding support;

- Consider revising the eligibility criteria for the SSHRC Postdoctoral funding opportunity to ensure that traveling or relocating to a new area to complete the funded work or research is not a requirement of these opportunities. The goal is to allow the full participation of postdoctoral fellows with disabilities.

7. Establish a single point of access for information on accessibility in SSHRC programs, and monitor changes in accessibility requests sent to this inbox to help SSHRC identify where barriers continue to exist.

8. In consultation with postsecondary institutions, NSERC and CIHR, publish an equitable, accessible, inclusive, and transparent policy framework that addresses requests for adaptive measures and deadline extensions. Provide a non-exclusive list of the types of frequently requested **accessibility supports** offered, so that accessibility is readily available and planned for, rather than only offered after an accessibility request is made, which falls into adaptive measures (an after-thought), rather than explicit accessibility. This also includes extension requests, and clearly and publicly communicating the process to make such a request.

3.3. Barrier 3: Application Evaluation

Introduction

Applicants to SSHRC funding opportunities are assessed according to evaluation criteria defined for each funding opportunity. Depending on the funding opportunity, applicants may also provide information on "special circumstances" that have had

an impact on their research profile, which application reviewers are asked to consider in their evaluation.

Sub-Barrier 1: Evaluation Criteria

SSHRC funding opportunities, including Tri-agency funding opportunities managed by SSHRC, employ an array of evaluation criteria. For grants, the evaluation of an applicant is often conducted through an evaluation criterion called "capability", a problematic term that depends on ableist assumptions. For scholarships and fellowships, an applicant's research profile is assessed based on several evaluation criteria. For example, for Canada Graduate Scholarships—Master's Program, applicants are evaluated according to "academic excellence", "research potential", "personal characteristics" and "interpersonal skills". Information about the applicant is often provided in the form of a CV or built into the application form itself as part of a research contributions section, in which the applicant describes their education and research activities.

Current evaluation criteria disadvantage applicants who have research profiles that do not align with these ways of assessing, prioritizing certain experiences or indicators related to research "productivity" and outputs at the expense of others, such as leadership. Obtaining an equitable evaluation can be particularly difficult for early career students and researchers with disabilities, who already face additional barriers securing research funds. This lack of financing forces students to obtain other jobs, which then limit the time devoted to their studies, while simultaneously trying to remain competitive candidates for increasingly scarce tenure-track positions, funding, and other opportunities.

Sub-Barrier 2: "Special Circumstances", Information Confidentiality, and Self-Identification for People with Disabilities

"Special Circumstances"

Currently, for almost all funding applications, applicants are provided with an optional section to describe "special circumstances" that affect their research. These special circumstances go by many names in the academic and SSHRC ecosystems, including "career interruptions", "life circumstances", and "allowable inclusions". While we use "special circumstances" to simplify the report, we are referencing the meaning of all these possible names. For researchers with disabilities, the assumptions behind all variants of "special circumstances" are

problematic. These have the effect of ensuring that the focus is not on the systemic or structural aspects preventing equitable and inclusive consideration, but rather on supposedly individual failures to maintain "normal productivity" which is an equally ableist concept.

Any information shared in this section of an application (and others with a similar purpose) involves significant privacy risks, as SSHRC staff and application reviewers all have access to these documents. Applicants may, therefore, be in a vulnerable position if they choose to share this information, since doing so can introduce significant bias, discrimination, and stigma in the evaluation of their application and work. Application reviewers are required to complete CIHR's **Unconscious Bias Training**,which isa small training module that tries to reduce negative perceptions of disabilities. But at present, SSHRC does not provide transparent information as to how potentially sensitive personal information that applicants may share around how they are affected by ableist systems and practices in higher education is safeguarded.

Information Confidentiality and Self-Identification for People with Disabilities

"Disclosure" or self-identification is a topic ACASA has discussed extensively, including why we don't use this term in our work (refer to **Appendix A: Acronyms and Definitions** for more details on this). We feel strongly that it applies to all areas of a SSHRC funding process, and its complexity has made it difficult to decide how best to manage information privacy and self-identification of students and researchers with disabilities. The honest answer is that how safely information is kept and shared is closely linked to the evaluation process and criteria. Once our recommendations in those areas are implemented by SSHRC, we hope many barriers around the need for self-identification and its associated privacy issues will be reduced. Both assessment criteria and processes, as well as self-identification (and confidentiality of this information), need to be reviewed by the Tri-agencies in close collaboration with the expertise of disability-led partners (from academia and wider communities), to achieve systemic change.

In the meantime, the committee has identified possible subject matter experts to lead this work, as well as several recommendations, but we do not yet have a clear way forward.

Recommendations for Barriers to Application Evaluation

1. Change ableist terminology currently used in evaluation criteria, including but not limited to "merit review", "ability", "capability", and "productivity". The assumptions embedded in each of these terms place researchers with disabilities at great disadvantage in the application, reviewing, and adjudicating processes. (Please refer to **Appendix A: Acronyms and Definitions** for some historical context on "meritocracy".)

2. Work to reframe the "Special Circumstances" sections of applications. SSHRC should also provide transparent and accessible information on its safeguards for ensuring the privacy of applicant information. And until the "Special Circumstances" section is changed, develop guidelines, and implement training for application reviewers on how to evaluate the impact of such circumstances on research profiles, including:

   - Consult with graduate students (master's and doctorate levels), postdoctoral researchers, staff, and faculty with disabilities, as well as with disability-led community organizations, to provide transparent and accessible information for application reviewers on how to safeguard the privacy of applicant information;

   - Until equitable assessments are widely implemented in SSHRC competitions, SSHRC needs to develop guidelines and implement training for application reviewers on how to evaluate the impact of "special circumstances" of research profiles, including:

     - Identifying how ableist norms and expectations devalue the research, teaching, and community or outreach work of scholars with disabilities;

     - Develop guidelines to assist applicants who choose to share information about their "special circumstances", to reduce possible discrimination they may face as a result.

3. Develop guidelines for application reviewers on equitable assessment of Disability Studies, theories and methods, important accessibility costs, and rights of scholars with disabilities to participate in all research opportunities.

4. Include an assessment of the overall accessibility, equity, diversity, and inclusivity of the proposed research project, regardless of how directly or indirectly its themes or contents relate to IDEA areas (such as Disability Studies, etc.). It is a matter of training students, citation patterns, ways of

doing research, running an inclusive lab, etc., to transform our practices and environments to make them more inclusive and accessible for all students and researchers. Eligibility to apply and evaluation processes must be reviewed to become less ableist, ensuring equitable opportunities to apply. Since researchers and students with disabilities are disadvantaged at all levels of the application and evaluation processes, SSHRC must consider ways to make equity a priority:

- This needs to include that SSHRC set aside an amount of funds to be awarded only to researchers and students with disabilities, to recognize students with disabilities, recognize the importance of their contributions, improve their representation, and improve their likelihood of full participation in SSHRC programs, as well as in academia. Particular concern must be exercised in exploring and mitigating the possible negative outcomes of this vital but imperfect equity measure. The committee agrees that students and scholars with disabilities are profoundly underfunded and must receive better financial support. However, allocating specific funds to allow us better access and inclusion could have inadvertent outcomes, such as reducing the number of scholars with disabilities who receive funding. We understand this risk, but until the system allows those with disabilities to fully participate without barriers, having such a measure that ensures people with disabilities are not forced to compete in a fully ableist system is essential;

- For this reason, we also recommend that the funds specifically allocated to support scholars with disabilities be structured so as to not exclude such scholars from receiving funding from SSHRC's "main funds". A way to alleviate having many marginalized groups compete for the same "specialized funds" could be to work with the Tri-agencies to ensure these other groups also get similar measures;

  Such initiatives already exist for Indigenous scholars in the form of the new Tri-agency Indigenous Scholars Awards and Supplements program (at the master's level), and through master's and doctorate scholarships for Black scholars. With these equity measures, award holders from these groups receive additional funds when they are awarded a scholarship, and funds are also awarded to Black or Indigenous

candidates whose applications received the "substitute candidate" ranking (placed on the waitlist for funds), but who did not ultimately receive funding. And because the Tri-agencies have limited reach and control within postsecondary institutions, a predetermined number of awards is set before these specialized funds reach the institutions. Currently, for Black scholars, the number of additional SSHRC awards are as follows: 6 SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellowships, 10 Canada Graduate Scholarships—Doctoral awards, and 20 Canada Graduate Scholarships—Master's awards. SSHRC also offers 95 Undergraduate Student Research Awards to Black student researchers at the undergraduate level, but this is a new program that has not yet been adapted to Black graduate level students. Expanding additional support for students with disabilities at the undergraduate level must be considered as well. Overall, the models offered by the programs for Black and Indigenous scholars are concrete examples of equity measures that could be adopted to allow better support specifically for students with disabilities, while limiting the possible harm of having many minoritized groups compete for the same funding opportunities;

- Concurrently to this equity measure, SSHRC needs to do more to reduce the higher accessibility barriers linked to belonging to a small postsecondary institution with an already low number of funded applications. The committee recommends SSHRC develop a way to increase allocation numbers for small institutions to help students with disabilities have more equitable opportunities to receive funding;

- The creation of evaluation committees who are trained in IDEA and specifically tasked with assessing applications from applicants with disabilities must be considered, so that they are not competing or being evaluated by standards and assessors who have no understanding of their realities, or competing against people who do not live with the barriers associated with disabilities. While ACASA recognizes that a separate entity is not a perfect solution to the complex systemic issues at hand, in the current climate, we recommend it because we still need concrete equity measures until better systems are implemented;

As an alternative stop-gap measure, consider ensuring there is someone in each traditional evaluation committee with lived experience of disability, as they can provide context and understanding to other committee members. These assessors need to be fellow researchers who are guided by standards created by and for us;

- Concurrently to these specialized IDEA evaluation committees, we also recommend that SSHRC improves its recruitment tactics and policies. SSHRC needs to make clearer that having previously received SSHRC funding is not a requirement to serving as a volunteer evaluator. Outreach efforts must be made to reach scholars who might be willing to participate despite not having been funded;

- Create guidelines that allow students and researchers with disabilities to apply beyond the 12 prescribed months currently used. This would ensure that different timelines do not hinder the possibility of applying or of being granted funding. (This recommendation could be helpful to a broader set of marginalized communities, but the committee did not reach consensus. Please refer to **Recommendations for Barriers to the Application Process** for our concerns about the possible barriers tied to offering these measures to a broader audience beyond scholars with disabilities);

- Implement a SSHRC-led support system for applicants with disabilities. This could allow a remote "proxy" person to help an applicant access the SSHRC platforms, help input information into the application forms, and provide feedback and editing support of application content;

- Create evaluation criteria that are adaptable to suit the context (stage of career, nature of the funding opportunity, etc.) and discipline;

- Consider the creation of a mentorship program for researchers and students with disabilities. This could allow students to experience genuine inclusion in academia, giving them sorely needed hope that it is a more achievable goal for them, too. Additionally, having access to a network of people (not necessarily limited to one's own field or institution) would help build a sense of community and ease the burden of isolation most of us face. This network could also help with sharing best practices and tools, create partnerships, and connect us with

people able to provide opportunities to advance our careers.

Tenured faculty members who have received SSHRC funding could be paired with early career researchers or students as mentors, or ACASA could lead the creation of such a support and mentoring system, which SSHRC could help promote and advertise;

○ Consider that research is a shared experience, and that there is a need to move away from the model of a single principal investigator. Instead, emphasis should be placed on the ability to put together a diverse and well-rounded research team, as the research is a group effort. Mechanisms to enable students with disabilities to benefit from this model must be put in place, so they are not left out of opportunities to contribute until they become faculty members (if they reach this level).

5. In partnership with NSERC and CIHR, it is critical to review the use of evaluation criteria that assess an applicant's "capability" and "productivity", particularly in the case of students and early career researchers. This is to ensure consideration of a broad range of research contributions and alignment with the agencies' commitments to the **San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA)** that aims to improve how the outputs of scholarly research are evaluated. In addition, the evaluation criteria should:

○ Include the "**Disability Tax**" in the evaluation or the attribution of points used to score applications used to decide which ones get funded. The objective is to acknowledge the additional workload imposed by inaccessible spaces and systems, and the ways in which working against systemic discrimination impacts an individual's contributions. These include contributions measured by conventional (and ableist) metrics such as peer-reviewed articles, monographs, conference presentations, and grant applications. It is possible that eventually, once our committee's recommendations are implemented, this measure will no longer be necessary;

○ Prioritize the inclusion and full participation of researchers with lived experience of disability and inaccessibility as a relevant criterion to select evaluators for SSHRC committees;

○ Reframe "capability" to limit the weight or perceived importance tied to having a high number of publications. This criterion does not equitably

assess researchers and students with disabilities, and does not speak to the quality of the published work. More emphasis needs to be placed on lived experience of disability, knowledge mobilization and outreach activities, maintaining relationships with communities, and mentoring.

6. Consult with the disability community and subject matter experts to identify and implement options to revise the "Special Circumstances" sections of applications, to increase consistency of its use and assessment of applications across funding opportunities.

7. Ensure ways to enhance the protection of privacy of information, with regards to data collection and use in all SSHRC services and programs. This is to ensure that people with disabilities are not discriminated against by sharing information that could help assess them equitably, or forced to not include it for fear of lack of confidentiality or possible stigma, and clear guidelines about who accesses this information, for how long, and with what intent.

8. Until a decision is reached on the "Special Circumstances" section, develop guidelines, and implement training for application reviewers on how to evaluate the impact of "special circumstances" on the research profile of an applicant, including:

   ○ Providing help to understand the barriers faced by researchers with disabilities through required disability-led IDEA training and/or other accessibility- and equity-related training;

   ○ Highlight the implicit understanding that researchers from marginalized communities, such as people with disabilities, Indigenous People, racialized people, and 2SLGBTQIA+ people, often spend extra time navigating "teach-me moments", micro and macro aggressions, and other harmful interactions and pressures;

   ○ Identify ableist norms and practices, to recognize how they can devalue certain methods of knowledge creation and mobilization (including those around disability);

   ○ Develop guidelines to assist applicants who choose to share information on "special circumstances", to reduce some of the emotional labour, time, and administrative burden created by the need to share such information.

9. Implement the requirement that a member of an evaluation committee be appointed and tasked with ensuring that inclusive practices are being followed throughout the evaluation. An accessible form template needs to be generated by SSHRC in collaboration with disability-led (university and community) partners with lived experience and expertise of disability, to ensure this requirement does not in itself become an accessibility barrier. A report of the process would be generated and submitted afterwards to demonstrate how this was achieved. Such an institutional practice needs to be applied to the committees in each institution evaluating applications before the last selection is sent to SSHRC, to make sure researchers and students with disabilities are not being discriminated against before they even enter the national pool of SSHRC applications.

10. Develop guidelines for application reviewers about equitable assessment of disability research in terms of broad community collaboration, use of disability-generated theories (e.g., Mad Studies, Crip Studies, etc.), the high costs associated to accessibility needs, and rights of people living with one or more disabilities to participate in all research:

    ○ With regards to measures to assist reviewers in understanding and mitigating bias and ableism, we suggest that a letter of intent be sought from any potential reviewer pertaining to their commitment to anti-ableism and IDEA. This would apply only to prospective evaluators whose submitted CVs or work summaries (including community work) do not demonstrate previous knowledge of IDEA, disability work, and lived experience with disabilities.

11. In consultation with NSERC and CIHR, review the use of letters of support across applicable funding programs. While they can be helpful to some applicants, and therefore should not be removed entirely if there is no other process to replace it, letters of support are still a significant barrier for many students and researchers with disabilities, and cannot continue to be the only benchmark to highlight one's skills and research proposals:

    ○ This could mean including provisions in the existing letters of support guidelines to help letter writers present an applicant in the best light, and in a way that does not rely on traditional (ableist) indicators that convey bias. Letters of support should be encouraged to address systemic barriers and challenges faced and overcome by the applicant.

12. Consider ways of avoiding unnecessary labour in self-identifying or sharing confidential information. The committee recommends that SSHRC require minimal supporting documents. Previously documented accommodations or adaptive measures secured by applicants should be considered adequate:

- In addition to having the option for accessibility information obtained through universities or institutions to be shared with the Tri-agencies, there must be a separate option to go directly through SSHRC for accessibility measures, as some people do not share this information with these parties, or they have not had their rights granted by that institution;

- Hiring practices within internal SSHRC competitions need to provide knowledgeable and disability-informed support staff for accessibility needs. There is a trend in hiring practices in academia and beyond that favours the hiring of individuals for positions related to IDEA who do not have expertise, lived experience of disabilities, or ties to this community. SSHRC needs to implement a disability-led system (informed by academic and community knowledge) by which IDEA expertise of potential hires is measured;

- The idea of an "accessibility passport" that could be used across all Tri-agency platforms would be a valued tool to provide accessibility while reducing duplicate labour that people with disabilities must do to gain access to accessibility measures. It was suggested that there could be three levels of accessibility support:

  - A series of accessibility measures for which self-identification alone is sufficient;

  - Certain accessibility measures (e.g., ASL) that can be obtained through self-identification or medical sign-off. For this, it was suggested that a form be developed of common accessibility supports, allowing the applicant to tick the ones required, accompanied by the signature of a doctor or health professional on the form. It was noted that requesting doctors or health-care professionals to draft letters can be inaccessible, expensive, a lengthy process, and perpetuates a medicalized model of disability;

- Customized accessibility measures (e.g., first class travel), which are subject to a higher level of scrutiny. Someone knowledgeable should assist in this process;

  ○ For these levels, it was further noted:

  - Canada Council for the Arts provides an excellent model;

  - 80 to 90% of accessibility measures should be straightforward forms with checkmarks for the adaptive measure required, either with only self-identification or, at most, a doctor's signature. Ideally, there needs to be a predetermined list of common accommodations one should be able to simply self-declare to obtain;

  - The signature of a doctor should only be requested if it is a requirement for releasing federal funds;

  - An existing accommodation, for example with a person's own postsecondary institution, should suffice as proof when requesting the same or similar accessibility measure through the Tri-agencies;

  - If going directly to the Tri-agencies, the individual should only have to go through the process of obtaining that accessibility measure once. It should not have to be re-requested every time.

13. It was noted that there is an important drawback to relying on doctors' notes for validation, as many people will have difficulty accessing health professionals. More fundamentally, the Advisory Committee rejects requiring the "validation" of the lived experience of people with disabilities by medical professionals:

    ○ It was noted that the Canada Research Chairs Program is considering moving away from self-identification to attestation, in part related to concerns about false claims of identity, as in the case of some non-Indigenous researchers making fraudulent claims to be of Indigenous descent. These attestation forms include language that provides some measure of assurance against false claims, and reduces the necessity for documentation for people with disabilities:

      - The committee was interested in attestation, but expressed concern that such requirements may create yet another hurdle for

academics with disabilities. We are also not convinced that sufficient attempts to "defraud" the accessibility system exist to implement attestations, which are problematic in their own ways;

- The point was raised that one can identify as having one or more disabilities with accessibility costs, or as not disabled but still having accessibility costs. Not everyone self-identifies as disabled by their disabilities. Identity, in some ways, is irrelevant; the person should just be able to attest that their research is impacted by ableism and inaccessibility. The Canada Research Chairs Program relies on identity to fulfil targets, but there is a lack of connection to the disability community, as well as disability theory or knowledge, which identity alone does not provide;

- The importance of focusing on what the barrier or accessibility need is, rather than on the person, was noted. However, the point was also raised that focusing on concrete measures can erase the bigger context and place more emphasis on symptoms or fixes rather than systemic change towards greater IDEA;

- There was a comment that it is difficult to ask people to quantify or describe how their research is impacted by their disabilities or barriers. Not everyone will be able to articulate this, and reviewers may not be able to adequately consider this information in their evaluations.

3.4. Barrier 4: Application Reviewers

Introduction

Reviewers volunteer their time to assist in SSHRC application review processes. They are enlisted based on individual experience and expertise in their discipline, and do not represent all institutions. SSHRC seeks to ensure a diversity of perspectives: reviewers may be from Canada or abroad; they may come from postsecondary institutions or they may come from organizations across the public, private, and not-for-profit sectors. This does not, however, ensure equitable representation in reviewing members, nor does it ensure the full inclusion and participation of reviewers with disabilities.

Sub-Barrier 1: Accessible Application Review Communications, Tools, and Documents

The communications that take place between SSHRC and application reviewers, including emails, letters of thanks and welcome, and orientation meetings, are often in inaccessible and non-inclusive formats. In addition, application reviewers are provided with several tools and documents to complete their evaluation, either via the Extranet or the platform used by the funding opportunity. These tools and documents are also often in **inaccessible formats** and not compatible with assistive technologies. The barriers related to tools, documents, and communication we identified for applicants in **Barrier 1** are equally significant in the context of accessibility for application reviewers.

Sub-Barrier 2: Reviewing Committee Workload

Each committee member typically reads and scores between 10 to 50 applications, which varies according to the funding opportunity. The volume of work and time constraints are based on guidelines established by and for people with no disabilities, and present barriers to the participation of researchers with disabilities. These guidelines do not consider the extra time and energy devoted to navigating barriers and managing disability in everyday life. Further, they do not consider how it makes taking on any additional volunteer work harder for researchers with disabilities.

People with disabilities are also systematically more precariously employed and with lower incomes, meaning that time and energy spent on secondary, unpaid tasks, can threaten the completion of primary work and financial stability in paid work. However, not taking on volunteer work can negatively impact a researcher's profile and opportunities within their own institution, which further limits access to steady work, income, and representation of people with disabilities in academia and SSHRC committees.

The workload of SSHRC reviews also does not consider that, due to low representation, the expertise and knowledge of researchers and students with disabilities are already over-solicited in academic as well as community settings, where efforts are being made to improve inclusion and accessibility.

Sub-Barrier 3: Reviewing Committee Meetings

Depending on the funding opportunity, application reviewers may be required to attend meetings in person, which poses a barrier to accessibility. Travel to and from meetings also must meet strict regulations that do not allow for flexible means of transport that meet the accessibility needs of reviewers with disabilities. Other aspects of in-person meetings are sometimes inaccessible to application reviewers with disabilities. The venue may be inaccessible, non-inclusive (such as lacking quiet spaces), have poorly designed gathering places and excessive distances between locations (from elevators to main location, for example), and may cause some participants to experience a physical barrier, as well as sensory overload and anxiety.

Language supports, such as simultaneous interpretation (French and English), sign language (including ASL and LSQ), and live captioning or CART services (French and English), are typically not offered at SSHRC committee and orientation meetings (whether virtual, hybrid, or in-person) unless requested. Automatic captions are available in English or French, but SSHRC staff who host meetings may not be aware of this function, and may not communicate it to the committee or know how to use it. The lack of language supports offered can present a barrier to the participation of application reviewers with disabilities who are not bilingual, or who require additional supports.

Whether virtual, hybrid, or in-person, long meetings without regular breaks are inaccessible and often exclusionary. Certain social activities can also be inaccessible to some committee members.

Recommendations for Barriers for Application Reviewers

1. For funding opportunities that hold application review meetings in person, investigate and begin to provide an accessible and inclusive hybrid option.

2. Develop standard practices to maximize the accessibility and inclusion of all meetings (whether virtual, hybrid, or in-person), including but not limited to considerations such as regular breaks, encouraging multiple ways to provide input, flexible meeting formats, flexibility on types of travel to and from the meeting, the accessibility and inclusion of the physical space, etc. In addition, poll application reviewers to determine if they have additional accessibility needs.

3. Train SSHRC staff and application reviewers in the accessible meeting practices referenced above.

4. Ensure that all meetings (virtual, hybrid, in-person) have:

- Automatic captions (French and English);
- Simultaneous interpretation (French and English);
- Live transcription or CART services (French and English);
- Automatic captions provided by meeting platform (French and English);
- ASL, LSQ, and PISL sign language interpreters.

5. In addition, ensure that all communication to potential committee members and meeting materials are provided in accessible, inclusive formats.

6. Reduce committee member workload and offer accessible options for workload and timelines.

7. Investigate ways to increase the participation and inclusion of researchers with disabilities as application reviewers.

8. Provide regular reports with evidence of improvement to accessibility and inclusion, to encourage participation.

3.5. Barrier 5: Financial Considerations: Disability Tax and Accessibility Tax in Research

Introduction

SSHRC's current grant programs do not include accessibility supports such as sign language interpreters, CART captioning, assistive technology, and mobility assistance as dedicated line items in proposed research budgets. This means that costs incurred for providing accessibility supports are deducted from the overall grant and must be submitted within a budget as part of an individual research grant. The resulting inequitable allocation of research funds is further exacerbated by discrimination based on the types of disability "categories" offered that influence which accessibility needs are supported. The extra costs for conference travel often borne by researchers with disabilities also must be covered from existing funds, rather than being covered by a separate funding stream. For this reason, scholars with disabilities may miss important professional and learning opportunities, which are taken for granted by non-disabled colleagues. Criteria for eligible expenses connected with access supports are often unclear and inconsistent.

Recommendations for Barriers to Financial Considerations: Disability Tax and Accessibility Tax in Research

1. Work with postsecondary institutions to ensure that guidelines on eligible accessibility and inclusion expenses are clear, and that a transparent and streamlined process exists for approving these requests, including a non-exhaustive list of pre-approved accessibility costs.

2. Add a new budget line on all SSHRC grant applications for applicants to include costs associated with accessibility supports. Include as part of the instructions a non-exhaustive list of frequent accessibility costs and guidelines to require all grant holders to be clear about how they will include researchers, trainees, and participants with disabilities in their proposed project.

3. Require all postsecondary institutions to set aside a portion of institutional grants, with transparent processes for access and inclusion, for the support of students, researchers, and trainees with disabilities.

4. Develop an accessibility fund as part of SSHRC's overall grant fund, to be distributed:

   - To teams with identified researchers with disabilities as per the Canada Council model: a separate budget for accessibility costs capped at a percentage of the grant (e.g., an additional, but not limited to, 30%). A trained staff member then assesses the budget and approves it. If the grant is awarded, the accessibility portion is automatically awarded from a separate accessibility fund. Any of the access fund dollars not spent on access by the end of the grant are returned to the access funds;

   - As post-grant applications for extraordinary and unforeseen accessibility costs (e.g., a new researcher with a disability joining the team after the initial application was submitted.

5. Funds required to ensure accessible and inclusive participation for researchers should not come out of funds allocated for research. And the process must avoid additional applications or administrative steps to address barriers to participation (i.e., through the lens of "accommodations"):

   - Applicants should have access to separate funds as first planned in their application, and subsequent funding throughout the grant or scholarship's lifecycle, to address participation, inclusion, and accessibility barriers not addressed in the funding application.

6. Consider a survey to identify accessibility barriers and to capture the experiences of people with disabilities who have interacted with SSHRC either as applicants, reviewers, or in other roles. The gathered results must be evaluated through several lenses, such as Critical Disability Studies, Gender-based Analysis Plus, etc.

Appendix A: Acronyms and Definitions

Acronyms Used in This Document

- **ASL**: American Sign Language

- **CART**: Communication Access Realtime Translation

- **CIHR**: Canadian Institutes of Health Research

- **CRCC:** Canada Research Coordinating Committee

- **CV, curriculum vitae, or CCV**: Canadian Common CV (used across Tri-agency platforms)

- **DORA**: San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment

- **IDEA**: Inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility (refer to full definition below)

- **LSQ**: Langue des signes du Québec

- **NSERC**: Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada

- **PISL:** Plain Indigenous Sign Language

- **SSHRC**: Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council

- **TGMS**: Tri-agency grants management solution

- **WCAG**: Web Content Accessibility Guidelines

Definitions

Ableism: is a belief system, analogous to racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, or ageism, that sees persons with disabilities as being less worthy of respect and consideration, less able to contribute and participate, or of less inherent

value than others. Ableism may be conscious or unconscious, and may be embedded in institutions, systems, or the broader culture of a society. It limits the opportunities of persons with disabilities and reduces their inclusion in the life of their communities.

Accessibility: having the possibility to fully participate without barriers, injustices, or inequities.

Accessibility Supports versus Adaptive Measures: our committee was deeply engaged in providing leadership to help SSHRC move away from the "accommodation" model, which carries the connotation of mere tolerance rather than inclusion, and of "adaptive measures", which only respond to a lack of accessibility after the fact, rather than pre-emptively. We also rejected the notion that only people with accessibility needs should be responsible for having these supports made available (usually in a case-by-case format). Our goal was to focus on recommending measures to make accessibility supports available in a planned, systemic way that didn't leave accessibility only as a reaction to a lack of access.

Accessible Formats: refers to tools, strategies, and technologies used to present information in a way that supports and includes people with disabilities. Accessible formats help ensure better access and navigation of content. It can, for example, involve converting information from its original format into formats that are perceivable, understandable, and usable by people with a very wide range of disabilities and needs.

Accountability: in the context of disability and people with disabilities, accountability refers to the responsibility of individuals, organizations, and society as a whole to ensure the rights, well-being, and inclusion of people with disabilities. It involves being answerable for actions, decisions, and policies that impact the lives of individuals with disabilities, and holding relevant parties responsible for any shortcomings or violations of their rights.

Applicant: for the purpose of this document, includes all persons contributing to the development and submission of an application, including the person leading the project (director), along with any co-applicants/investigators/directors, collaborators, team members, or partners.

"Capability": currently, capability is the name of an evaluation criterion employed by several SSHRC funding opportunities, to "evaluate" the perceived (and woefully subjective) value of an applicant and their proposed work. Our committee reframed

this term by using the word "contributions", in order to present a much wider range of ways in which students, scholars, and community members who have disabilities participate, contribute and improve the research, mentoring, and teaching landscapes, and much more.

Collaboration: SSHRC places much emphasis on who is the "primary researcher" in a proposed project. The ACASA team felt it was yet another expression of ableist norms. More specifically, identifying only one researcher puts people with disabilities, who often work in collaborative teams to reduce barriers, at a significant disadvantage in terms of being evaluated equitably in the general sense, and according to their perceived contributions.

Disability: ACASA is inspired by the social model of disability, according to which disability results from the interaction between a person's physical, psychological, sensory, or neurocognitive traits or particularities, on the one hand, and barriers that are present in the person's environment, on the other hand. Ableist environments and contexts directly affect the ability of people with disabilities to partake in various aspects of life and to flourish. The social model of disability is to be contrasted with the medical model of disability, which locates the source of disability in the individual rather than in ableist environments and contexts.

"Disability Tax": refers to the various unrecognized and undervalued barriers that people with disabilities must face, manage, and try to overcome in all systems and levels of society.
This can, for example, include additional time, the lack of resources (material, financial, etc.), as well as the physical and mental energy required to navigate systemically ableist and inaccessible contexts, services, as well as environments and systems that are opaque and difficult, since they are built for people with no disabilities.

Disclosure: ACASA uses the words "sharing" confidential information and "self-identification for people with disabilities" as a replacement for the concept of "disclosure". We reject the perceived negative connotation built into the term "disclosure", which insinuates that disabilities and people with disabilities are somehow shameful. "Disclosure" came about as a legal term established in the Privacy Act and, along with medical language, perpetuates ableist terminology and attitudes towards disability and towards people with disabilities.

Discrimination: refers to the unjust or prejudiced treatment of individuals or groups based on certain characteristics or attributes, such as disabilities, ethnicity, gender or gender identity, age, religion, sexual orientation, or any other characteristic (legally protected or not). It involves treating people less favourably or unfairly, denying them equitable rights, accessibility, opportunities, participation, or privileges based on these characteristics.

Fellowship/Scholarship: funding offered to those registered as master's or doctoral students, or who are postdoctoral fellows. There is no effective difference between these two terms.

Grant: funding for applicants who are not registered as students. Depending on the funding opportunity, postdoctoral fellows may be eligible to apply for grants.

IDEA (Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility): this acronym is a more inclusive extension to the better known "EDI" acronym (equity, diversity, inclusion). It can have multiple meanings depending on the context. To us, IDEA refers to a framework that promote these values in all domains, such as education, workplaces, communities, and beyond. Such a framework can guide policies, practices, and initiatives in different contexts to create more accessible, inclusive, and equitable societies.

Inclusive Language: the committee uses the term "inclusive language" to refer to our very conscious and intentional wording that aims to respect and include all individuals, regardless of their diverse identities, backgrounds, and characteristics. We tried to promote equity, foster inclusivity, and avoid language that may be discriminatory, stigmatizing, or marginalizing. We recognize that language can shape perceptions, reinforce stereotypes, and perpetuate systemic biases. We also acknowledge that Canada's two official languages, French and English, exclude Indigenous languages in their equitable access and use policies. In addition, French and English have both shared and distinct linguistic challenges in terms of achieving inclusive language.

Innovation: refers to the process of creating, developing, and implementing new ideas, concepts, products, services, or processes that bring about positive change or value. It involves introducing something novel, improved, or disruptive that addresses a need, solves a problem, or creates new opportunities. In our context, innovation also acknowledges the non-recognized and undervalued forms of contributions made by people with disabilities that may differ from the established and ableist norms.

Intersectional Lens or Intersectional Justice: an intersectional and systemic definition of disability-related equity and justice recognizes that disabilities do not exist in isolation, but instead intersect with other aspects of a person's individual and collective identities, such as ethnicity, gender and gender identity, sexuality, socioeconomic status, and more. It was critical to ACASA to acknowledge that the experience of disability is shaped by multiple intersecting factors, and that these influence each other, resulting in complex and diverse experiences that cannot easily be understood if they are not considered as interrelated.

Marginalized Communities and Identities: we use this term to acknowledge that words such as "vulnerable" or "equity-seeking" carry problematic connotations when applied to people and identities who are systematically disadvantaged, excluded, discriminated against, and oppressed within a society or social structure. We use "marginalized" instead, to highlight that this is a social construct, and that the impacts of marginalization can be wide-ranging, affecting areas such as education, employment, housing, care, health care, criminal justice, political representation, and more.

"Merit" and "Meritocracy": like other similar terms, "merit" and "meritocracy" dominate evaluation criteria to judge the perceived worthiness of an applicant or their work. Many present-day institutions' invocations of "meritocracy" are historical in their ableism. The word "meritocracy" was coined by Michael Young in his quasi-satirical The Rise of the Meritocracy (1958). In a preface to the book, he explained that he wanted to show how "vulnerable and fragile" a society based on "meritocratic" notions could be. The ACASA team has, therefore, moved away from such language to the best of our abilities.

Negative Stereotyping: it involves making assumptions or judgments about individuals or communities without considering their qualities, experiences, or diverse perspectives. Negative stereotyping can perpetuate harmful biases, reinforce discriminatory attitudes, and contribute to a wide array of deep social inequities.

Prejudice or Prejudicial Attitudes: in our work, prejudices may be defined as deeply held negative perceptions and feelings, conscious or unconscious, about people with disabilities, and profoundly anchored in the collective imagination.

Privacy: UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Article 22, "Respect for privacy", stipulates that no person with disabilities, regardless of place of residence or living arrangements, shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful

interference with their privacy, family, correspondence, or other types of communication; or to unlawful attacks on their honour and reputation. Persons with disabilities have the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks.

Stigma: stigma refers to a mark of disgrace, shame, or social disapproval that is associated with a particular characteristic or identity. It is a negative and often unfair judgment or perception that society holds towards individuals or groups based on certain attributes, behaviours, or circumstances. Stigma is interrelated to stereotyping, discrimination, and prejudice.

Transparency: refers to the quality or state of being open, honest, and accountable in one's actions, decisions, and communications. In this context, it involves both ACASA and SSHRC's commitment to sharing information (policies, processes, motivations, actions, decisions, etc.) that affect people and communities with disabilities. We aimed to share all information freely, openly, and clearly to ensure clarity, trust, and understanding among all stakeholders across the country, whether they are individuals, organizations, or institutions.

The Tri-agencies: the three branches of the federal research granting agencies are composed of the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC), and SSHRC.

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